

## STRATEGIC MILITARY LEADERS—LEADING TOMORROW

BY

COLONEL NG WAI KIT  
Singapore Army

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U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

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# USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

## STRATEGIC MILITARY LEADERS – LEADING TOMORROW

by

Colonel Ng Wai Kit  
Singapore Army

Dr. Leonard Wong  
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013



## ABSTRACT

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The global environment is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. In the military, where leaders have to deal with the unforeseen and where men are demanded to die if necessary to fulfill their tasks, strategic military leadership remains the most baffling of the arts. Four key leadership competencies stand out. We need strategic leaders who are good at doing the right things *and* doing things right – leaders who have the *mental agility* to choose the correct goals to achieve, the *social intelligence* to inspire his team towards those goals, the *robustness/mental toughness* to stay the course and to conduct their business within the bounds of *ethics*. This paper strives to define the four strategic leadership competencies and offers developmental modalities to grow and develop the heartware of the military.



## STRATEGIC MILITARY LEADERS – LEADING TOMORROW

### A Changing Environment

The National Defense Strategy identified an array of traditional, irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive challenges that pose distinct threats to the U.S.<sup>1</sup> Clearly the bipolar world of fighting conventional enemy orders of battle exclusively is past. A few key features stand out:

- (1) A wider range of adversaries, not necessarily states, operating from a complex, widely distributed battlespace would be able to threaten the US, even from afar.
- (2) Given the tremendous relative advantage the U.S. military enjoys today, and probably into the future, adversaries would seek asymmetric (non-traditional) approaches.<sup>2</sup> Rather than to fight in the “red ocean” and accepting the key constraining factors of war, adversaries would aim to deny the distinctive strength of the U.S. military, fighting in the “blue ocean” paradigm that is undefended, unexpected, unnatural, and unfair.<sup>3</sup>
- (3) The line between war and peace, combatants and non-combatants, will become increasingly blurred. Peace would become harder to define. Unrestricted warfare that embraces non-military war operations will expand the battlefield beyond the physical/military realm to incorporate political, social, economic, ecological domains to coerce the enemy.<sup>4</sup>
- (4) Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational (JIIM) operations will be the norm.



(5) The “CNN effect” will be pervasive with war played on a global stage before a live camera that never blinks. Immediate public awareness and scrutiny of strategic decisions will be impossible to avoid.

(6) Our ability to predict future “black swan” events will remain low. A “black swan” is an event that is unexpected, has an extreme impact, and is made to seem predictable by explanations concocted afterwards.<sup>5</sup> We just do not know what we do not know, and some uncertainty cannot be predicted *a priori*.

This paper attempts to define the four leadership competencies that will be necessary to prevail in the future operating environment. The competencies will be useful in directing human resource development and in the development of strategic military leaders.

### The Facets Of Leadership

FM 6-22 organized leadership into 3 levels: direct, organizational and strategic.<sup>6</sup> Strategic leaders are “responsible for large organizations ... establish force structure, allocate resources, communicate strategic vision, and prepare their commands as a whole for their future roles.”<sup>7</sup> Transiting from an environment of relative clarity in missions, goals and strategies at the operational and direct levels, to operating within a JIIM framework in a VUCA strategic environment, would naturally demand new competencies of the strategic military leader. This does not mean that the core leader competencies they acquired as direct and organization leaders are irrelevant, but rather, they would need to adapt and grow these competencies to meet the more complex realities of their strategic environment.

However, it is neither useful nor instructive to exhaustively list every single leadership trait needed to operate successfully at the strategic level. To say everything is to say nothing at all. There is a need to focus and distill from the endless lists to what is fundamentally important. In my opinion, the four most important strategic leader competencies are *social intelligence*, *mental agility*, *robustness* and *ethics*. These competencies are required both in war *and* in peace. In peacetime, strategic military leaders organize, structure and prepare the military for future wars; in war, their role is to dominate and win.

### Social Intelligence

Daniel Goleman defines social intelligence as a combination of two inseparable domains: "social awareness, what we sense about others; and social facility, what we then do with that awareness".<sup>8</sup> Social awareness refers to a spectrum that runs from instantaneously sensing another's inner state (primal empathy), to understanding another's feelings and thoughts (attunement and empathic accuracy), to knowing how the social/cultural world works (social cognition). However, to maintain a fruitful interaction, one would also need social facility. Social facility's spectrum runs from the ability to interact smoothly at the nonverbal level (synchrony), to managing our emotions to present ourselves effectively (communication and influence), to genuine concern for others' needs and acting accordingly (concern).<sup>9</sup>

The emotional lives of human beings are a complicated mixture of rapidly elicited, semiconscious reactions to interpersonal signals and a slower, more articulate reflection on what we feel, how we felt earlier, and the appropriateness of those feelings.

Goleman proposes two relatively distinct brain pathways to explain this mix: a "low-

road" for the rapid processing of interpersonal signals which is relatively automatic and largely unconscious; and a "high-road" that permits a more reflective awareness, communication, and regulation of our emotional experience.<sup>10</sup> Both the social awareness and social facility domains range from basic, low-road capacities, to more complex high-road articulations.

Social intelligence, though needed at all levels, is especially pertinent for military leaders operating in the strategic realm. First, he works and lives in a more complex social and political *internal* environment. At the strategic level, "one works with peers, and leads as much by building consensus as by issuing commands".<sup>11</sup> This is especially the case when dealing with other agencies, inter-governmental bodies, UN, and coalition partners. The strategic leader needs to be socially aware of this complex team he must work with, and have the required social facility to influence them. Even for those that a strategic leader does command, he would need to create an open climate so that they are freer to explore, take risks, innovate, take on new challenges, and perhaps most importantly, tell the leader the truth. Goleman observed that the best bosses are those that are socially intelligent – "who are trustworthy, empathic and connected, who make us feel calm, appreciated, and inspired."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, global U.S. national interests would require the military to continue with the strategy of worldwide engagement. The necessity of cross-cultural savvy is critical for leaders for both working with diverse workmates and engaging people from other culture. This includes the "ability to understand cultures beyond one's organizational, economic, religious, societal, geographical, and political boundaries".<sup>13</sup> But beyond that, besides

just the *ability to understand cultures*, to be culturally effective, one would need the full suite of social intelligence skills – both social awareness and social facility.

For the full panoply of social intelligence to come into play, the strategic leader must master both his “high-road” and his “low-road”.<sup>14</sup> Whilst it is widely accepted that the “high-road” is eminently trainable, Goleman’s research showed that the “low-road”, such as primal empathy, empathic accuracy and synchrony, could also be improved, even though it would take more time and effort.<sup>15</sup>

### Mental Agility

FM 6-22 defined mental agility as “a flexibility of mind, a tendency to anticipate or adapt to uncertain or changing situations ... It helps break from habitual thought patterns, to improvise when faced with conceptual impasses, and quickly apply multiple perspectives to consider new approaches or solutions”.<sup>16</sup> War is filled with uncertainty. Change is the norm, not the exception. Yet it is more than just being comfortable with uncertainty – like a chameleon simply blending in with its surrounding – but rather, the agile leader needs to be able to adapt, sense-make from a chaotic environment with incomplete information, and to challenge organization habits. The agile strategic leader needs to “scan the environment, understand their world from a systems perspective, and eventually envision different futures and directions for their organization”.<sup>17</sup> The VUCA environment and the determined efforts of adversaries to employ asymmetric approaches require strategic leaders to be mentally agile. War is not waged with mathematical precision. Leaders need to embrace originality and not conventionality. Leaders need to be always thinking ahead, to do something that the enemy is not expecting, something which will disarm him. The enemy’s centre of gravity is elusive,

and easily lost if not acted against decisively in a timely manner. Doctrine cannot prognosticate the exact nature and form of future conflict, but agile leaders stay ahead of the ambiguous environments and create winning “blue ocean” strategies to win future conflicts – strategies that make the adversary’s capabilities irrelevant by fighting in uncontested space. As Sun Tzu asserts, “you can be sure of succeeding in your attacks if you only attack places which are undefended.”<sup>18</sup> To be able to spy out the soul of one’s adversary, and to act in a manner which will astonish and bewilder him, this is generalship.<sup>19</sup>

Mental agility seems to draw from two supporting attributes: the ability to learn rapidly and *Coup d’oeil*. In an environment where change is accelerating, the ability to learn from experience rapidly, or “learning agility”, is one of the key predictors of leadership success.<sup>20</sup> Learning agility is the ability to learn new things, unlearn old things, and the wisdom to know the difference between the two. Learning new things is relatively easy. Unlearning is more difficult as past experiences often block our ability to see new information and limits our ability to change. Strategic leaders need to embrace learning agility to stay ahead of the game, which is to *outlearn* one’s adversary. As Arie De Gaus, head of planning for Royal Dutch/Shell said “Learning faster than your competitors is the only sustainable competitive advantage in an environment of rapid change and innovation.”<sup>21</sup> Learning agile leaders are “critical thinkers who examine problems carefully and make fresh connections with relative ease”, “like to experiment and are at ease with the discomfort that comes from change” and “are non-judgmental, able to recognize people as peers.”<sup>22</sup> The second facet of mental agility is *Coup d’oeil*, which Clausewitz defines as “the rapid discovery of a truth which to the ordinary mind is

either not visible at all or only becomes so after long examination and reflection.”<sup>23</sup>

*Coup d’oeil* could be translated as intuition. For Clausewitz, a military genius must possess a “harmonious combination of elements”<sup>24</sup>, and identifies two quantities that are indispensable. Clausewitz explains, “Now, if one is to get safely through this perpetual conflict with the unexpected, two qualities are indispensable . . . The first is figuratively expressed by the French phrase *coup d’oeil*. The other is resolution.”<sup>25</sup>

Recent neuroscience has debunked the long held view that analysis and intuition operated separately. Scientists now believe that the combination of analysis and intuition becomes “creative insight,” which is “the ability to take existing pieces of information and combine them in novel ways that lead to greater understanding and suggest new behaviors and responses.”<sup>26</sup> *Coup d’oeil* accords a mentally agile leader to re-combine elements of a problem in a new way, to give new solution to a new problem. It seems to work best under time constraints, and when the environment is uncertain, complex or ambiguous – exactly the strategic environment that a strategic military leader has to work in.

## Robustness

General Archibald Wavell claimed that the first essential of a general is robustness or mental toughness, which he defined as “the ability to stand the shocks of war”.<sup>27</sup> If the materials of war are necessarily hardened, with a high margin over the normal breaking strain, so too should be the minds of their generals. Delicate mechanisms are of little use in war. Clausewitz wrote, “Firm in reliance on his own better convictions, the Chief must stand like a rock against which the sea breaks its fury in vain.”<sup>28</sup> A strategic military leader must therefore have the “mental and emotional capacity to cope with the

stress and strain of war”.<sup>29</sup> Crucial decisions have to be made under “conditions of enormous stress, when noise, fatigue, lack of sleep, poor food, and grinding responsibility add their quotas to the ever-present threat of total annihilation.”<sup>30</sup> He must be able to cope effectively with adversity and pressure, and retain concentration in the face of many potential distractions. It is that calm courage in the midst of tumult, that serenity of soul in danger, which is the greatest gift of nature for command.

Concomitant to, and inseparable from robustness, is “what we call the fighting spirit, the will to win”.<sup>31</sup> This is an unshakeable self-belief, the ability to rebound after failures (resilience), persistence or dogged refusal to quit. It is the ability to cope with the disappointment of defeat, to stand the strain of responsibility, and the inner strength to inspire his troops to victory again.<sup>32</sup> It is an unshakeable perseverance and conviction towards some goal despite pressure or adversity. As the supreme object of war is to impose our will upon our enemy, the strength of character and tenacity to prevail of our strategic military leaders are the pivotal moral virtues in the system of war. The confidence of the men in the ranks rest on them. General J.F.C. Fuller wrote “Neither a nation nor an army is a mechanical contrivance, but a living thing, built of flesh and blood and not of iron and steel.”<sup>33</sup> It is not increasing weapon power alone that will win wars, but the courage and spirit of the men behind the machines, especially of their generals. No matter how many systems are involved or how complex they are, inspiring his men towards mission accomplishment remains a primary responsibility of the strategic leader.

## Ethics

Ethics refers to principles that define behavior as right, good and proper. Such principles do not always dictate a single "moral" course of action, but provide a means of evaluating and deciding among competing options.<sup>34</sup> For the direct leaders of troops, it may be perfectly clear, in most or all circumstances, which courses of action are morally right.<sup>35</sup> However, in the more complex and multifaceted environment of strategic leadership, ethical decision making is far more complex. Strategic leaders face multi-dimensional pressures, some internal and some external, that are usually conflicting. Many ethical dilemmas pit two core (good) values against each other, such as truth telling versus loyalty to others/institution, short-term versus long-term, individual versus community, or justice versus mercy. Strategic military leaders need to be sensitive to ethical dilemmas, but must be also able to detach themselves from the immediate situation in order to see the bigger picture. According to many ethicists, moral imagination – being sensitive to moral issues and options – is the key to ethical behavior.<sup>36</sup>

Most people have an internal moral compass based on religious beliefs, cultural roots, family background, personal experiences, laws, organizational values, professional norms and political habits. These are not the best values to make ethical decisions by — not because they are unimportant, but because they are not universal.<sup>37</sup> There are a few widely accepted ethical perspectives, such as Utilitarianism (do the greatest good for the greatest number of people), Kant's categorical imperative (do what is right no matter what the cost), Rawl's justice as fairness (guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities), Communitarianism (shoulder your responsibilities/seek the common good) and Altruism (love your neighbor).<sup>38</sup> Strategic military leaders need to be adapt in



utilizing any combinations, or all, of these ethical perspectives in their ethical decision making process.

Whilst a more advanced moral thinking would be useful when confronted with the novel and the unanticipated, it is an insufficient premise for ethical behavior. Having reasoned which course of action is the right one to follow, the strategic military leader needs also to have the moral motivation and courage to pursue the right course of action especially in light of opposition, fatigue, social acceptance and personal sacrifice. Strategic leaders must model ethics with all their actions. Subordinates do not learn ethics through memorizing a published list of values, but vicariously through the behavior of their leaders. In a volatile, uncertain and complex environment, ethics cannot be directed, it must be lived.

### A Square Deal

The four strategic leadership competencies, though listed separately, are irrevocably melded together. We need strategic leaders who are good at doing the right things *and* doing things right – leaders who have the mental agility to choose the correct goals to achieve, the social intelligence to inspire his team towards those goals, the robustness/mental toughness to stay the course and to conduct their business ethically. The four competencies depend upon and reinforce each other. For example, making and implementing ethical decisions takes both mental agility and communication skills. Strategic military leaders first need to understand the problem and decide on the solution. Then, he must be able to articulate his reasoning, convince others of the wisdom of his position, and work with others to implement his ethical choice. It is also important that there is a balance between the competencies, a natural creative tension,

without any one competency being overly dominant. Take for instance robustness.

There is a fine line between tenacity and obstinacy. The ferocious resolve in enforcing one's will cannot operate in a vacuum. As S. L. A. Marshall rightly noted, "It [the leaders' will] cannot be imposed successfully if it runs counter to reason. Things are not done in war primarily because a man wills it; they are done because they are do-able."<sup>39</sup> Yet, if at Fort Donelson, if General Grant had listened to his subordinate commanders, his half-routed army would have been defeated. Lastly, all four competencies are required. Let us recall that those commonly acclaimed as "great" leaders are not necessarily good men. It is possible to be morally blemished and still be a highly effective combat commander.<sup>40</sup> Every totalitarian ruler, for instance, has the social intelligence to justify his own tyranny and manipulate his followers to his own ends. But surely this is undesirable. Truly great strategic leadership is a square deal – all four competencies manifested in roughly equal measure.

### Nurturing Nature

Jim Collins observed that companies that made the transition from good to great began the transformation by "*first* [getting] the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and *then* figured out where to drive it."<sup>41</sup> He rejected the old adage that people are your most important asset. In a good-to-great transformation, people are not your most important asset. The *right people* are.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, to have strategic military leaders with the four competencies, one should not approach from the *training* perspective, but rather, it might be more fruitful to consider it more holistically from the *human resource development* perspective. As a profession, strategic military leaders are *always* groomed from within the military. As such, the military has inherent

advantage not available to most companies, that is, to invest in growing the *heartware* of the military. This would include first attracting the right people, retaining those that have demonstrated the potentiality of strategic competencies, and finally, developing, training and deploying them.

Having the right competencies in our strategic leaders is, in itself, insufficient. Every organization has an organizational culture, a unique character that is in essence the “collective personality” of the organization. An organization’s culture circumscribe the appropriate standards of behavior organizational members should adopt. It determines how the organization really functions and accounts for “how things are done around here.”<sup>43</sup> Strategic military leaders are as affected and constrained by the military culture as those they lead. A military culture that is incongruent to the four strategic competencies would structurally dampen the manifestation of those competencies. It is difficult to fit square-peg competencies into a culture that condones only round-holes! The fall of Arthur Andersen was blamed largely on Anderson’s hierarchical, lockstep culture that promoted a “don’t question” mentality at all levels. Closer to home, the problems at the US Air Force Academy in 1990s could be attributed to her hostile culture against women. However, organizational cultures are not static. It could be changed. All members help to shape the collective atmosphere, but leaders exert the most influence. FM 22-100 assigns primary responsibility for shaping the institutional culture to her strategic leaders.<sup>44</sup> It is the strategic leader’s responsibility to form the new culture, educate the force, and lead by example in order for a new culture to take root.

The military, as an institution, therefore has two crucial roles: first to develop the right people, with the right strategic competencies, as its strategic leaders; and second, to provide a healthy organization context for the manifestation of those strategic competencies.

### Developing Social Intelligence

Developing social intelligence in future strategic leaders starts with attracting the right type of officers-to-be into the military and then systematically, through embedding and reinforcing HR mechanisms, prepare the most promising leaders for strategic level positions. Selecting the right talent is important. In developing social intelligence in strategic leaders, one shouldn't try to put in what was left out, but instead draw out what was left in. Instruments to assess officer applicants' social intelligence quotient could be developed to guide entry decisions. As strategic military leaders are promoted from within the military, social intelligence assessments could be embedded into the Officer Evaluation System (OES) and considered as a factor in promotion and ranking boards. Such HR mechanisms might face resistance, especially from the "old guards" within the ranks. However, as socially intelligent leaders rise to the strategic level, a tipping point would be reached where the climate and culture of military command resonates with the value of social intelligence.

Whilst social intelligence is an individual's innate quality, it is possible to develop social intelligence. Genes are not destiny. The human brain is designed to change itself in response to accumulated experiences. As social intelligence involves both the "low road" and the "high road", developing social intelligence extends to more than just cognitive development ("high road"). An exclusive focus on mental abilities ignores the

invaluable role of both affect and the “low road”. Goleman suggested “a perspective shift, one that looks beyond mere knowing *about* social life to include the automatic abilities that matter so much as we engage, both high road and low.”<sup>45</sup>

Developing the “high road” for social intelligence is relatively straight-forward. It involves broadening the horizon and the social/cultural awareness of the strategic leader and equips him with the capacity for extracting the rules, protocols and norms that guide appropriate behavior in a given social setting. This could include courses in foreign languages, cultures, international relations, or regional studies; internships in Joint and other agencies; attachments to foreign militaries, NATO or UN; and suitable operational deployments overseas, etc. This largely involves acquiring and mobilizing social/cultural knowledge.

Developing the “low road” for social intelligence is more complicated as this involves re-engineering cognitive processes that occur unconsciously, with only the end products reaching awareness, and then only sometimes.<sup>46</sup> The “low road”, or what neuroscientist term as the limbic brain, is a slow learner, requiring extended practice and feedback. This is particularly so when the challenge is to relearn deeply ingrained habitual social behavior. Tools to train the “low road” directly exist, such as the MicroExpression Training Tool which allows people to practice identifying the brief emotional expressions that flit across people’s faces so as to train empathic accuracy.<sup>47</sup> However, the crux to developing the “low road” is in self-directed learning. A possible model of learning, adapted from one that was developed by Richard Boyatzis<sup>48</sup>, involves five steps:

- (1) Identifying the ideal social intelligence attributes. The leader needs to embrace the vision of the socially intelligent leader that he wants to be. It becomes the fuel that maintains the drive and work at the often difficult and frustrating process of change.
- (2) Discovering one's real self. The leader needs to identify their strengths and gaps in social intelligence. To uncover this reality, the leader needs to make a critical self assessment *and* seek out other people's perspective to get an accurate picture. Multiple perspectives are needed to negate blind spots. The 360-degree assessment tool, where perspectives from bosses, peers and subordinates are garnered, is a good tool to this end.
- (3) Deciding on a learning agenda. To begin to change, to develop socially intelligent attributes, the leader needs to develop a learning agenda. The learning agenda is not focused on performance outcomes, but on change. Neither is it constrained to work, but also in other spheres of life. The goal is to build on one's strength. But as developing socially intelligent skills might require unlearning repertoire of habits learned long ago, it takes commitment and constant reminders to stay focused on undoing those habits. But over time, the need for reminders will diminish as the new behavior becomes a stronger pathway in the brain.<sup>49</sup>
- (4) Experimenting with and practicing new socially intelligent attributes, thoughts and feelings to the point of mastery. Great athletes spend a lot of time practicing and a little time performing. Yet, military leaders seem to spend all their time performing.<sup>50</sup> The leader needs to experiment with socially

intelligent attributes and practice them to the point of mastery. This might require self-mastery in overcoming the impulsive old habits first, before focusing on practicing the new modes of leadership. One possible way is through “stealth learning”, where desired socially intelligent skills are practiced outside the workplace.<sup>51</sup> Life is the laboratory of learning. Another strategy is to tap on the power of mental rehearsal. Brain studies have shown that imagining something in vivid detail can fire the same brain cells that are actually involved in that activity.<sup>52</sup> In other words, mental rehearsals can greatly improve how well a leader learn new skills and break old habits.

- (5) Developing supportive and trusting relationships to sustain change. The leader needs a safe environment for authentic learning. Mentors and coaches can provide such leaders room to act, trying out new styles and strengths.

### Developing Mental Agility

Similar to developing social intelligence, the organization need to have the right type of people, teach them the right theories and give them the right experience. But the focus in developing mentally agile leaders is not on knowledge acquisition, but rather how to interpret knowledge and what to do with it. Do not mistake the map for the territory. Mentally agile should not focus on pure and well-defined ideas as their frame of reference, and reject the outliers. Rather, they need to consider the extremes to understand real-world phenomena.<sup>53</sup> Real world, alas, is quite unlike the neat mathematical models that we use to describe them. Most of the time, frames of reference are “transparent” to the untrained user. Strategic thinkers, however, need to be conscious managers of the ones they operate with if they are to operate in an

uncertain world.<sup>54</sup> To produce good military adaptive thinkers, one must train a performance – a thinking performance – in much the same way that one trains any skilled, well-rehearsed, and extensively practiced behavior to enable expert performance.<sup>55</sup> They must practice. Training simulations now exist that allow participants to experiment and make decisions under stressful, dynamic conditions. The simulation content is based on real world lessons learned and stories from subject matter experts that reinforce the need for adaptive thinking. Further, training exercises should allow unbounded “red teams” to bring the full force of their potential to bear. Although this uncertainty would initially stop some exercises in their tracks<sup>56</sup>, but over time, as exercise participants would be allowed to explore the dynamics involved, a new level of learning would emerge. Most of all, the impact of “black swans” might be diminished.

Perhaps the strongest damper to mental agility is the military culture. Bureaucratic organizations like the military innately prefer to rely on established procedures/doctrines and analysis in decision making. The culture promotes the obedience of rules and regulations. Yet, mental agility requires one to honestly question the status quo and, at times, rely on experience and gut feeling to arrive at out-of-the-box solutions. It requires remodeling our culture of discipline to what Gen Schoomaker termed as “a culture of innovation”. A culture of innovation is predicated on two key enablers: openness to ideas and tolerance of failure. Openness to ideas means the culture should value individuality more than uniformity, personality than congruity, and originality than conventionality.<sup>57</sup> This should be encouraged in peacetime as in war. Currently, for instance, new ideas are met not with an open mind but with time-consuming layers of



evaluation. As innovative concepts tend to disturb plans and/or require unplanned resources, leaders tend to look for reasons not to use a new idea instead of searching for reasons to explore it further. However, if we want to have any hope of outlearning our adversary, it is imperative that we embrace openness fully. Also, the perceived culture of “zero defects” needs to be eliminated. Those who fail should be given an opportunity to learn from their mistakes, not punished. Not many organizations have strategic leaders like IBM founder Thomas Watson. A young executive who entered his office after making a \$10 million blunder started by saying, “I guess you want my resignation”; to which Watson answered: “You can’t be serious. We’ve just spent \$10 million educating you!”<sup>58</sup> Similarly, we need to allow for honest mistakes and reward prudent risk-taking, without jeopardizing their careers or causing their non-selection for future promotions. To this end, the OES would need to be adjusted to balance between the attainment of short-term goals and rewarding a spirit of innovation and learning.

### Developing Robustness

Robustness is a concept that military leadership development programs have paid scant attention to. Yet in competitive elite sports, athletes, coaches and applied sports psychologists have consistently referred to mental toughness as one of the most important psychological characteristics related to outcomes and success.<sup>59</sup> An individual’s robustness or mental toughness is defined by *both* inherited characteristics (a dimension of personality) and by learning, experience and environmental influences.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, besides selecting innately robust strategic military leaders, avenues exist to further develop their robustness.

First and foremost is the development of valid and reliable measurement instruments to enable our strategic military leaders to gain insight into their own level of robustness. The predominant methodological approach to the measurement of robustness has been via the use of questionnaires. An established questionnaire is the Mental Toughness 48 Inventory (MT48)<sup>61</sup> which was designed to provide a reliable and quick assessment of an individual's ability to withstand pressure in a range of workplace environments. Although numerous studies have validated the construct of the MT48 typically in the sporting arena, further studies are required to adapt the MT48 for military use. When developed, the MT48 could be employed to support human resource decisions. Secondly, there is a need to design a robustness training package. This might include the use of imagery to create or recreate stressful circumstances or adverse conditions in exercises, as current research suggests that robustness might only be observable in stressful or adverse situations.<sup>62</sup> One such possible training tool is the HardiTraining program.<sup>63</sup> The HardiTraining program is designed to better one's performance, leadership, conduct, and health under stressful circumstances.<sup>64</sup> Specifically, military personnel undergoing HardiTraining will increase in the courage and motivation to do the hard work of transformational coping, socially supportive interactions, and effective self-care, in order to turn stressful circumstances from potential disasters into constructive growth opportunities instead.<sup>65</sup> Lastly, the mechanisms by which robustness affect performance remains unclear. Therefore, there is a need for further research to examine how robustness operates so as to design successful intervention programs to enhance it.

## Developing Ethics

Developing ethical reasoning in leaders is probably the most difficult of the four competencies. This is further compounded by the fact that even if ethical training is effective, the link between knowing about ethical reasoning and *actual* moral behavior is tenuous at best. Many leaders fail in their moral behavior because they are victims of their typical mental models or scripts.<sup>66</sup> A mental model or a script is a kind of internal symbol or representation of external reality, hypothesized to play a major role in cognition and decision-making. Once formed, they may replace carefully considered analysis as a means of conserving time and energy. Unfortunately, this can leave out the ethical dimension of a situation. Similarly, when it is primarily systems or structures that drive action, behavior tends to become less ethical and more procedural or normative. That is, people act less on the basis of “what I ought to do”, but rather on the basis of “what I am told to do or what others are doing”. Leaders are just as likely to be corrupted by the existing moral atmosphere as followers, turning a blind eye to questionable practices because “it’s always been done that way.” Furthermore, some leaders may unintentionally commit ethical blunders because they lack the necessary knowledge, skills and experience. It is possible to blunder into good ethical choices, but it’s far more likely that wise decisions are made when leaders are guided by some widely used or universal ethical principals or standards.

According to the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), ethical capacity consists of knowledge, skills, perspectives and motivation.<sup>67</sup> Expanding a strategic leader’s ethical capacity would require him to learn about ethical standards and principles that will help him make wiser ethical choices. In ethics, ignorance is dangerous. In this, the military does a good job in requiring all their leaders to go through an annual ethics program.

However, as ethical dilemmas for strategic leaders are more complex, they need also skills in moral reasoning. This would include establishing an ethical decision-making format. Possible ethical decision-making formats include Kidder's ethical checkpoints, Nash's 12 questions and the case study method.<sup>68</sup> The case study method, which is widely used in the medical profession, is an especially useful format for moral reasoning as leaders frequently employ the type of analogical (as opposed to purely rational) reasoning reflected in case studies in ethical decision making. Whilst the ethical decision-making formats systematize the moral reasoning process, the use of well established, universal ethical perspectives can help leaders set their ethical priorities. Perspectives include Utilitarianism, Kant's categorical imperative, Rawl's justice as fairness, Communitarianism and Altruism. Ultimately, moral action is final test of leadership ethics. Whether the strategic leader acts upon his reasoned moral choices largely depend on his motivation and the organization's culture.

Peter Senge observed that "[w]ithout a genuine sense of common vision and values, there is nothing to motivate people beyond self-interest."<sup>69</sup> The military has a strong set of values and code of ethics that play an important role in shaping the ethical climate. Most, if not all, strategic military leaders embrace the shared vision and values, as they had gone through a long socialization process in the military. Nonetheless, ethical commitments could still be improved through the design of its monetary/non-monetary reward systems and performance evaluation process. They should not only consider *if* goals were achieved, but rather also considers *how* they were achieved. The phrase "I don't care how you get it done ... just get it done" should be abolished from the military lexicon. Finally, in the military where cohesion and loyalty are the keystones

in the arch of war, the danger exists that they undermine a climate of openness. Socially intelligent strategic leaders would encourage dissenting views to be aired and never put cohesion first in making important ethical decisions.

### Conclusion

The global environment is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. For the enduring success of the U.S. military, I believe the four most important competencies of a strategic military leader are social intelligence, mental agility, robustness and ethics. We need strategic leaders who are good at doing the right things *and* doing things right – leaders who have the mental agility to choose the correct goals to achieve, the social intelligence to inspire his team towards those goals, the robustness/mental toughness to stay the course and to conduct their business ethically. In the problem of war – where leaders have to deal with the unforeseen, where men are demanded to die if necessary to fulfill their tasks – strategic leadership remains the most baffling of the arts and will probably remain that way. It is therefore imperative that we spare no effort in growing the *heartware* of the military. We need to attract, retain, motivate, train and optimize the deployment of the strategic leaders that embodies the four key competencies. And we need to remodel our military culture to encourage the cultivation and their growth. It is about harmonizing spirit and system, that together we may better weave the tapestry of peace for our nation.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, March 2005), 2-3. *Traditional* challenges are posed by states employing recognized military capabilities and forces in well-understood forms of military competition and conflict. *Irregular* challenges come from those

employing “unconventional” methods to counter the traditional advantages of stronger opponents. *Catastrophic* challenges involve the acquisition, possession, and use of WMD or methods producing WMD-like effects. *Disruptive* challenges may come from adversaries who develop and use breakthrough technologies to negate current U.S. advantages in key operational domains.

<sup>2</sup> Melissa Applegate, *Preparing for Asymmetry: As Seen Through the Lens of Joint Vision 2020* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institutes of the U.S. Army War College, September 2001): 2.

<sup>3</sup> W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne, *Blue Ocean Strategy* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> 超限战 (Unrestricted Warfare), PLA Publishing House, Feb 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York, NY: The Random House Publishing Group, 2007), 1-16.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Army, *Army Leadership - Competent, Confident, and Agile*, FM6-22, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, October 2006), 3-6.

<sup>7</sup> FM6-22, 3-7.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (New York, NY: Bantam Dell, October 2006), 84.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Harris, “How Do You Measure People Skills? The elusive landscape of social intelligence,” 13 November 2006; available from <http://www.slate.com/id/2153385/?nav=tap3>; Internet; accessed 16 October 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Martin L. Cook, *Moral Reasoning as a Strategic Leader Competency* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, August 1999): 1.

<sup>12</sup> Goleman, 277.

<sup>13</sup> Dr Leonard Wong et al., *Strategic Leadership Competencies* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institutes of the U.S. Army War College, September 2003): 7.

<sup>14</sup> For simplicity, I have deliberately avoided terms from the neuroscience domain – limbic brain for “low road” and neocortex for “high road”, even though Goleman and other research uses these terms.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership – Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 104-105.

<sup>16</sup> FM6-22, 6-1.

- <sup>17</sup> Wong et al., 6.
- <sup>18</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 66.
- <sup>19</sup> Major General J.F.C. Fuller, *Generalship: It's Diseases and their Cure* (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing Co., 1936), 10.
- <sup>20</sup> Dave Ulrich and Wayne Brockbank, *The HR Value Proposition* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 263.
- <sup>21</sup> Arie P de Geus, *The Living Company: Habits for Survival in a Turbulent Business Environment* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, May 2002), 149.
- <sup>22</sup> Ulrich and Brockbank, 263-264.
- <sup>23</sup> Carl Clausewitz, *On War* (London, UK: Penguin, 1968 (1832)), 142.
- <sup>24</sup> Clausewitz, 100.
- <sup>25</sup> Clausewitz, 141.
- <sup>26</sup> R. Stickgold and M. Walker, "To Sleep, Perchance to Gain Creative Insight?" *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 8, no. 5 (May 2004): 191.
- <sup>27</sup> General Sir Archibald Wavell, *Generals and Generalship* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1941), 15, 23.
- <sup>28</sup> Clausewitz, 104.
- <sup>29</sup> Graco W. 1984, *Characteristics of Competent Commanders* (Canberra, ACT: Australia Department of Defence, 1984), 72.
- <sup>30</sup> Norman Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1976), 32
- <sup>31</sup> Wavell, 43.
- <sup>32</sup> General O'Conner reportedly said 'I would never consider a commander completely successful until he had restored the situation after a serious and long retreat'.
- <sup>33</sup> Fuller, 5.
- <sup>34</sup> Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics, "Making Ethical Decisions," November 2002; available from <http://www.josephsoninstitute.org/MED/MEDintro+toc.htm>; Internet; accessed 16 October 2007.
- <sup>35</sup> Cook, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Craig E. Johnson, *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed) (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 43.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson, 129–146.

<sup>39</sup> S. L. A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Pub. Inc., 1978), 175.

<sup>40</sup> Major John M. Vermillion, “The Pillars of Generalship” *Parameters* (Summer 1987): 49.

<sup>41</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great – Why some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don’t* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publisher, 2001), 41.

<sup>42</sup> Jim Collins, 51.

<sup>43</sup> Ray Anthony, “Organizational Culture and Innovation,” *Innovative Leader*, 8 (January 1999): 1.

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Leadership Be, Know, Do*, FM22-100 (Washington, D.C.: US Department of the Army, 31 August 1999), 3-12.

<sup>45</sup> Goleman, 331.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph LeDoux, “Emotion Circuits in the Brain”, *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 23 (2000): 156.

<sup>47</sup> Ekman found that most people average around 40 to 50 percent accuracy on the first try, but after just twenty minutes or so of training, virtually everyone gets 80 to 90 percent correct.

<sup>48</sup> Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 109.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>50</sup> Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, “The Making of the Corporate Athlete” *Harvard Business Review*, (Nov 2000).

<sup>51</sup> Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 159.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>53</sup> Taleb, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Col Fernando Giancotti, “Strategic Leadership and the Narrow Mind: What We Don’t Do Well and Why”, *Concepts for Air Force Leadership*: 189.

<sup>55</sup> Dr Shadrack, “Training Adaptive Leaders,” *ARI Newsletter* 13, no. 1: 10.



<sup>56</sup> Such as in the conduct of the Millennium Challenge 2002 where the Red Team, under Van Riper, preemptively attacked and sunk sixteen Blue ships and assassinated the leaders of the pro-U.S. countries in the region. JFCOM staff had to restart the exercise. Unfortunately, they then decided to limit the Red Team's independence and the second round was all scripted.

<sup>57</sup> Wavell, 29.

<sup>58</sup> Garvin, D. A., "Building a learning organization," *Harvard Business Review*, (July-August, 1993): 78-91.

<sup>59</sup> Lee Crust, "Mental Toughness in Sport: A Review," *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 5 no. 3 (September 2007): 270.

<sup>60</sup> Garvin, p288.

<sup>61</sup> Dr P. J . Clough and K. Earle, "Mental Toughness Questionnaire (MT48)"

<sup>62</sup> Crust, 284.

<sup>63</sup> Salvatore R. Maddi, "Relevance of Hardiness Assessment and Training to the Military Context," *Military Psychology* 19, no. 1 (2007): 68.

<sup>64</sup> Crust, 68.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Johnson, 44.

<sup>67</sup> Johnson, 50.

<sup>68</sup> Johnson, 187-208.

<sup>69</sup> Peter M. Senge, (1990), *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation* (New York, NY: Doubleday/Currency, 1990), 274.